



# Sex Trafficking Awareness among Emergency Department Staff and Healthcare Providers

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## Abstract

Human sex trafficking is a major public health problem, both internationally and domestically. Children, youth, and adults, a majority of whom are women and young girls, are sex trafficked into and throughout the United States each day. These victims, who are forced into the commercial sex trade show signs of abuse, malnourishment, and have symptoms including headaches, infections, bruising, broken bones, and potential substance abuse issues.

With limited access to healthcare, these victims end up in emergency room departments while still in captivity. Research shows that sex trafficking victims are infrequently identified in emergency departments and in other healthcare settings. Although sex trafficking is a growing epidemic, there is little research to support that emergency room staff and healthcare providers have training on sex trafficking and victim identification.

*Key words:* human sex trafficking, commercial sex trade, healthcare providers.

## Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Identify the need for training of emergency room staff and healthcare providers.
2. Provide knowledge and tools beneficial to emergency staff and healthcare providers, that can increase victim identification, trauma informed engagement and appropriate long term care referrals.



## Methodology

This sequential mixed method study will use a sample of 100-120 emergency room staff who have face to face interaction and communication with patients and visitors.

Participants will be given a survey titled Awareness and Knowledge of Human Sex Trafficking involving Minors in Emergency Room Staff. Participant's responses to the survey will determine the need for training and education of emergency department staff on human sex trafficking.

## Key Questions

Will training emergency department staff increase the identification of sex trafficking victims?

Will training emergency department staff increase appropriate long term care referrals?



## Main Arguments



### Modern Day Slavery:

There are twice as many people enslaved today than during the African slave trade (Dovydaitis, 2014).

The U.S Department of State estimates that 900,000 people are trafficked across international borders each year: 80% are women and girls; 50% are female minors (Kloer, 2012, pg.8).

### Health Problems and Emergency Room Department:

Many health problems are associated with sex trafficking due to deprivation of basic needs, abuse, and hazardous/confined living conditions.

Most victims do not have identification, insurance or access to proper healthcare, leading to emergency department visits.

One study found: 87.8% of surveyed trafficking survivors encountered healthcare professionals during captivity and went unidentified; 63% were seen in emergency departments (Gurney et al., 2015).

### Training:

Emergency room staff and healthcare providers play a vital role in recognizing and responding to the needs of victims.

Healthcare providers have limited awareness of human sex trafficking and the characteristics of those it victimizes (Gurney et al., 2015).

One study found: 13% of surveyed healthcare providers felt confident they could identify a sex trafficking victim; 3% had received any training (Barrows & Finger, 2008).

Another study found: 2.1% of surveyed emergency department staff had received any training specific to sex trafficking; 89.7% received none, and 8.2% were unable to recall (Meyer, 2010).

### Trafficking Awareness for Health Care Act of 2014:

To provide for the development and dissemination of evidence-based best practices for health care professionals to recognize victims of a severe form of trafficking and respond to such individuals appropriately, and for other purposes.

### Increasing Victim Identification:

Increasing awareness of human trafficking can improve identification of victims in clinical settings, especially among high risk youth in immigrant communities (Baldwin, Eisenman, Sayles, Ryan, & Chuang, 2011).



### Provide Mandatory Trafficking Training on:

- Trafficking indicators
- Trauma informed victim interaction strategies
- Immediate response strategies
- Safety planning, referrals, and resources

### Outcome:

Increased victim identification, trauma informed engagement and appropriate long term care referrals.

## Results & Conclusions

Human sex trafficking is a major global issue that cannot be ignored (Dovydaitis, 2014).

Healthcare professionals across the board play a critical role in both finding victims of sex trafficking, while they are still in activity, as well as caring for their mental and physical needs upon release (Barrow & Finger, 2008).

Healthcare providers are trained to identify and assist victims of elder abuse, child abuse, and intimate partner violence. Training on sex trafficking needs to be another core area of training for emergency room and healthcare providers.

Just as recognizing other trauma victims has become an integral part of every patient assessment, emergency departments and healthcare providers need the knowledge and tools to also identify sex trafficking survivors (Patel, Ahn, & Burke, 2010).

Increased awareness on the issue of human sex trafficking, especially of children, has lead to an increase in the number of victims coming forward to leave the streets and seek help (Munoz, 2014).

### Trafficking Awareness for Health Care Act of 2014:

- Bill was passed in a vote by the House in January 2015.
- Bill was referred to Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions then will be sent to Senate for vote.
- If passed by the Senate, bill will then be sent to President for signature, before becoming law.

Federal legislative will be a critical component to creating national uniform training guidelines to identify sex trafficking victims, provide trauma informed interventions and referrals.



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